



TEXAS JUVENILE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

Response to the Independent Ombudsman Second Quarter Report, FY 2020 May 21, 2020

The Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) has received the FY 2020 Second Quarter Report from the Office of the Independent Ombudsman (OIO), and appreciates this opportunity to respond and provide updates.

TJJD updates

During the second quarter, TJJD continued to push ahead with Texas Model implementation. Texas Model mentors are now hired at each secure facility, and they provide support for the dorm direct-care staff in improving their ability engaging with the youth. TJJD also spent time in the second quarter solidifying the strategic goals of the agency through the current biennium and the next legislative session. These strategic goals—which will also be published in the upcoming five-year agency strategic plan—are focused on stabilizing the Texas juvenile justice system, improving current operations, building on the Texas Model foundations, and providing support to the local county probation departments.

As TJJD has continually emphasized, structure and accountability are at the core of the Texas Model. During the second quarter, TJJD developed plans for increasing youth accountability and behavior modification efforts within the state-operated facilities and while youth are on TJJD parole. TJJD now has processes in place to ensure the agency moves forward with seeking parole revocation for each youth who commits serious offenses while on parole. If a youth is in further need of rehabilitation in a secure setting, TJJD will always seek revocation of the youth's parole status when community resources have been exhausted.

TJJD staff have also now received approval from the TJJD Board to modify existing rules relating to youth behavior and discipline. These changes will allow the new violence and intervention continuum to come to fruition. On the first incident where a youth causes bodily injury to another person, that youth will be referred to the intensive intervention program. Upon the finding of true in the appropriate due process hearings, youth will be able to move throughout the intensive intervention program, and the existing redirect and Phoenix programs, to receive the appropriate level of intervention and behavior modification programming.

Staffing

In previous quarterly and site visit reports, the OIO has highlighted the high staff turnover rates and staffing shortages that have impacted the agency's five secure facilities. TJJD's pointed hiring efforts continue to show improvement on this front. At the beginning of the second quarter, TJJD had 756 total Youth Development Coaches across the five secure facilities. At the

end of the second quarter, the total filled positions increased to 819 coaches. This increase brought the total staffing percentage filled at the five secure facilities to 92% by the end of the second quarter.

Specifically, the OIO has highlighted concerns about the staffing strength at the Ron Jackson and Mart facilities. Through the second quarter, the Ron Jackson facility added 26 total coaches and the Mart facility added 49 total coaches. While TJJD has made clear progress, we must continue to focus on increasing the staffing strength at each state-operated facility. Staffing on hand at any given moment remains fluid, given the number of staff who can be out for training or other issues, but TJJD expects the successes in the agency's hiring efforts to continue.

Incident trends

Across all five secure facilities, there was a 4% decrease in all youth on staff assaults or unauthorized contact from the first quarter FY 2020 to the second quarter FY 2020. There was also an 8% decrease in youth on youth assaults or unauthorized contact from the first to the second quarter.

The Ron Jackson facility saw the biggest decrease in total youth on staff assaults. This facility was specifically mentioned in the OIO's first quarter FY 2020 report. There was a 45% decrease in the number of staff assaults with injury from the first quarter to the second quarter (29 in Q1 to 16 in Q2). The female Phoenix program has been successfully operating at the Mart facility since November 2019. TJJD is planning on expanding this female unit, and the male Phoenix program will also increase bed space to be able to accommodate youth that are placed in the new violence continuum.

TJJD monitors all incident trends at each facility to inform necessary operation decisions and implement corrective actions where necessary. TJJD is improving its ability to hold youth accountable for their aggressive behavior, and the partnership with the OIO is critical in informing the agency on how the provision of these new services and programming impact the youth in our care. As we move forward, TJJD will continue to rely on this strong partnership.

TJJD appreciates the opportunity to respond and provide an update to this OIO Report.